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Matter of Fact

The Dulles Testimony

By Joseph Alsop

THE HARD, disturbing facts and figures in the testimony of the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Allen W. Dulles, before the Senate Space Committee, can now be revealed on undoubted authority.

In brief, CIA Director Dulles told the Committee that the American Government expected the Soviet Union to have 35 intercontinental ballistic missiles "on launchers" by the end of June this year.

He stated that the Soviets would further be expected to have some 140 to 200 ICBMs operational by mid-1961.

He gave the estimate that the Soviets "probably" have two factories turning out ballistic missiles at this time. But he added that one or both of these factories may still be devoted, in part or in whole, to the production of intermediate range missiles.

Finally CIA Director Dulles admitted that these estimates, though used by the U. S. Government for planning purposes, were only the best estimates that could be made on the basis of the fragmentary, known facts. They had no claim, he said, to micrometric accuracy. If the estimates were erroneous, he further admitted, they might as easily err on the low side as on the high side.

THREE POINTS of the highest significance are implied by this testimony of the CIA director. His estimates show, first of all, what kind of ICBM lead the American Government now thinks the Soviets have. By next June, when the Soviets are expected to have 35 ICBMs "on launchers," we should have two operational Atlas squadrons, or a total of 18 ICBMs ready to fire. By June, 1961, when the Soviets are expected to have 140 to 200 ICBMs "on launchers," we should have five operational Atlas squadrons plus one Titan squadron, or a total of 54 ICBMs ready to fire.



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Second, the Dulles estimates explain both the business-as-usual defense budget and the complacent justification of that budget by Secretary of Defense Thomas S. Gates and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Nathan Twining.

If the estimates are indeed micrometrically correct (as Secretary Gates and Gen. Twining assume), the Soviets do not now have the number of ICBMs they need to wipe out the American nuclear

deterrent. Furthermore, our incoming ICBM squadrons will multiply the targets the Soviets must destroy more rapidly than the Soviets are expected to multiply their stock of operational ICBMs.

This is because three Soviet ICBM firings are needed to give the Kremlin 95 percent assurance of destroying one of our ICBMs in a "soft" launching site. Thus, even in the case of missiles in soft pads, each American ICBM that becomes operational creates a requirement for three more Soviet ICBMs. The ratio is much higher, too, in the case of American ICBMs in "hard" pads; and the Titan squadron that should become operational by mid-1961 will be fully "hardened."

For these reasons if the estimates are precisely accurate, and if there is no slippage in the scheduled activation of the American ICBM squadrons, there will be no moment when the Kremlin can risk a nuclear strike at the United States. For if the Soviets do not accumulate ICBMs more rapidly than the estimates allow, they will never have enough to take out the whole target system presented by the American nuclear deterrent. And thus they will never have enough ICBMs to avert an American counterstrike that would destroy the Soviet Union.

Third, however, the Dulles testimony clearly reveals the absolute reliance of the Eisenhower Administration policy-makers on the micrometric precision of the intelligence estimates—which CIA Director Dulles says cannot be micrometrically precise.

TO ILLUSTRATE, the brilliant Strategic Air Commander, Gen. Thomas Power, has repeatedly stated that the Soviets can now "wipe out" our nuclear deterrent with only 150 ICBMs, plus the same amount of IRBMs, which they are known to have in ample quantities. The estimates give the Soviets only 35 operational ICBMs by the middle of this year. By then, the complete activation of the first two Atlas squadrons will increase the Soviet requirement, as figured by Gen. Power, to something like 180 ICBMs.

The margin may appear to be ample, but it is really incredibly narrow. Our own Atlas ICBM plant is capable of turning out no less than 15 missiles per month, on three shifts, and on its single production line. This capacity output has never been attained because of business-as-usual budget making, but the possibility of this kind of Atlas output has existed for over a

year. Thus ten months of capacity output by the Atlas plant equals the present Soviet ICBM requirement as stated by Gen. Power.

CIA Director Dulles has now testified that the Soviets "probably" have not one, but two missile plants in production at present. Either, or both, of these plants may have, not one business-as-usual production line like the Atlas plant, but two lines in three shift production. That sort of situation in at least one plant was implied by Nikita S. Khrushchev's recent boast, that he had inspected a Soviet factory which produced no less than 250 "rockets" last year. The word "rockets" was used in a context that seemed to indicate "intercontinental rockets," of which Khrushchev had just been speaking. Thus the chance of error in the estimate can hardly be excluded.

YET THE WHOLE outlook would be hideously transformed by the most trifling error in the American intelligence estimates—a mere error, for example, concerning the actual moment when one or both of the Soviet rocket plants began production of ICBMs for operational purposes.

Soviet IRBM stocks were estimated to be ample for the target available as long as a year ago. If both Soviet plants were then converted from IRBM to ICBM production, the Soviets could now have far more than their basic requirement, as stated by Gen. Power. And they would have this requirement even after allowing most generously for diversion of Soviet ICBMs for tests, into satellites, and so on.

In fact, if both the two "probable" Soviet rocket plants began producing operational ICBMs at Khrushchev's rate, just four months ago, the Kremlin would now have the ICBM requirement stated by Gen. Power. This kind of error of a mere four months is vastly less, in turn, than the recurring optimistic errors in earlier national estimates. These have averaged a good two years.

These facts, in turn, explain why Gen. Power has been pressing so hard for a maximum airborne alert of his B-52s, in order to put at least a part of the American nuclear deterrent beyond reach of a surprise Soviet rocket strike. As has been remarked, gambling the whole national future on the chance that there cannot be an error of a mere four months in the intelligence estimates is simply a game of Russian roulette on an unprecedented scale.

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